

NEWS RELEASE  
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## **Service Estimates Economic Impact of Critical Habitat Designation for Five Southeastern Fishes**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is releasing the estimated economic impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation of five southeastern fishes in Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Alabama.

The Service also is re-opening the public comment period for the October 12, 2011 proposal to designate approximately 228 river miles and 22 acres of critical habitat for the Cumberland darter, rush darter, yellowcheek darter, chunky madtom, and laurel dace under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service is re-opening the comment period for 30 days through June 25, 2012, in order to allow comments on the proposed designation and the draft economic analysis. All five of these fishes were listed as endangered on August 9, 2011.

The ranges and abundance of these five fishes have seriously declined due to changes in their stream habitats resulting from mining, agriculture, reservoir construction, channelization, urban sprawl, pollution, sedimentation, and incompatible forestry practices.

The proposed critical habitat for the Cumberland darter is located in McCreary and Whitley counties, Kentucky, as well as Campbell and Scott counties, Tennessee. Fifteen critical habitat units are proposed and include roughly 53 river miles. Thirteen of these units are occupied by the fish and two are unoccupied. These unoccupied habitats provide additional habitat for population expansion and promote genetic diversity, which will decrease the risk of extinction for this fish.

At the time of listing, the Service assessed whether critical habitat would be prudent for these species, and found that it was; therefore, the Service is proposing critical habitat, as required by the ESA.

For the rush darter, proposed critical habitat is located in Etowah, Jefferson, and Winston counties, Alabama. Eight critical habitat units are proposed and include approximately 27 river miles and 22 acres of land.

The proposed critical habitat for the yellowcheek darter is located in Cleburne, Searcy, Stone, and Van Buren counties in Arkansas. Four critical habitat units are proposed and include approximately 102 river miles.

Proposed critical habitat for the chucky madtom is located in Greene County, Tennessee where one unit is proposed and includes approximately 20 river miles.

The proposed critical habitat for the laurel dace is located in Bledsoe, Rhea, and Sequatchie counties, Tennessee. Six critical habitat units are proposed and include roughly 26 river miles.

In addition, the Service conducted a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation, as required under the ESA. The analysis considered the potential impact of the designation on various sectors of the economy.

Based on the best available information including extensive discussions with stakeholders, the Service estimates that the designation could cost around \$644,000 over 20 years, or about \$56,800 annually. Most of these costs are administrative and are borne by federal and state agencies. However, some costs may be incurred by local governments and businesses. These costs stem from the requirement for federal agencies to consult with the Service regarding the potential impacts of their actions, or those they fund or authorize, on critical habitat.

Water quality management activities are most likely to be subject to the greatest incremental impacts of a possible \$273,000 over the next 20 years, followed by transportation at \$161,000; coal mining at \$79,000; oil and natural gas development at \$73,700; agriculture, ranching, and silviculture at \$36,100; dredging, channelization, impoundments, dams, and diversions at \$10,700, and recreation at \$10,000. More details on the methods used to generate these estimates, as well as the estimated impacts, are available in the draft economic analysis.

At the time of listing, the Service assessed whether critical habitat would be prudent for these species, and found that it was; therefore, the Service is proposing critical habitat, as required by the Act.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

The Service is encouraging public comments. Please check the *Federal Register* website tomorrow, May 24, 2012, at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, Docket # FWS-R4-ES-2011-0074, for the complete notice, the draft economic analysis, and instructions on how to comment. A copy of the economic analysis also can be obtained by contacting Stephanie Chance, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 446 Neal Street, Cookeville, Tennessee 38501; phone 931/528-6481, extension 211.

Critical habitat is a term defined in the Endangered Species Act (ESA). It refers to specific geographic areas containing features essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve, and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits. It does not allow government or public access to private land.

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